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THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

THE TEACHING OF
KARL BARTH
AN EXPOSITION
BY
R. BIRCH HOYLE
Second Edition, 7*s*. 6*d*. *net*

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

BY

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TRANSLATED BY

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STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT PRESS
58 BLOOMSBURY STREET, LONDON, W.C.1

Theology Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

First published December 1939

Printed in Great Britain

A TRANSLATION

OF

VOM CHRISTLICHEN LEBEN

PREFACE

What follows is printed from a shorthand report that was made by the theological students, Hans Bayer and Otto Maschke, of two Bible studies that I gave in May of this year to the local "Students' Christian Union." It is with some hesitation that I have acceded to the urgent request to publish them in this form. The loose, broad, and indeed vulnerable character that they had in extemporary delivery—at the time without thought of such developments—has been preserved throughout. I must therefore ask readers not to employ here the criteria that are justified in regard to a theological treatise or a prepared and written sermon, but to accept simply what is simply offered.

Münster i. W.
July 1926

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

"*I exhort you therefore, my brothers, by the mercy of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God—your reasonable worship. And do not adjust yourselves to the fashion of this world, but assume a new form through the renewing of your thought, that you may prove what the will of God is, that will which is good and acceptable and perfect.*"—Romans xii. 1, 2.

I

Dear friends, you have set me a difficult task. I was asked to speak to you on the subject of the *structure* of a Christian life. And then only this morning I was told that there was a desire to express it differently, and my address was to be about the *formation* of a Christian life. I will not weigh the two expressions in the balances. Still other ways of describing the same question and task could no doubt be found. Johann Tobias Beck wrote a book about the *birth* of the

Christian life. Following out that idea, one would perhaps speak about the *growth* and the *unfolding* of the Christian life. I assume that I rightly understand your question and your commission when I think that in every case in which you were speaking of life, the Christian life, you were thinking in some sense of *that* life which we men in our present state have actually to live now, each with his little Ego at the point of his existence; and that you were thinking quite concretely and definitely of the question: *What must, perhaps also what may, we as Christians do*, we who—to mention the most general—are baptized, and who now in some sense just because we are baptized, just because we heard in our baptism the call of God, should like to obey this call through faith—or at least have the yearning, the desire to deal rightly with this call? What is the meaning of this attention (even if there be nothing more than the yearning that I have mentioned), of this obedience to a call from which we cannot

completely get away—what is its meaning for our life as we live it from day to day? What are we to make of this activity of ours—once our life is regarded from this point of view—no matter how weak, helpless, awkward it be? What will then come to pass, what sort of "structure," what "formation" will be manifested from day to day in our inner and outer activity, since, of course, our life is from hour to hour an activity, an effort, a constant doing; our will is in movement; we set ourselves objectives, we reach points of vantage, and then from these we look ahead to still other points?

Let us, first of all, reflect for a moment on what is meant by *Christian life*. The situation is really such that we have got to tell ourselves: the Christian life in its true and proper sense, the Christian life that really and truly deserves the name is something that we do not live. A different person altogether lives this Christian life—God in Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit for us

and in us. And we should be from the very outset mistaking this question of ours, the answer to which we are trying to seek, if we did not quite forcibly remind ourselves of this proper meaning of our question, that we are primarily, when we get down to the depths and go to the utmost limits, asking about something that is not done by us, but which God has done, does, and will do.

He lives for us in His Son Jesus Christ. That is what was pledged to us in our baptism, that is the basis of our being Christians, of our being able to venture from afar to think of such a thing as the Christian life as being *our* life, life of our Ego. God lives for us in Jesus Christ. What is expressed in this short proposition we cannot at this moment exhaust to its depths. The meaning is: we are—I am, you are—objects of God's regard from all eternity. Exactly as I am in my present situation, in my present circumstances, on the road along which I have come and on which I have still to travel,

I am regarded and acknowledged by God, yes, infinitely far from Him as I am. Not as a second God but as a man who has sinned, is sinning, and will sin, and who can recognise himself as nothing else than lost, I am acknowledged by God in Jesus Christ His beloved Son, acknowledged, chosen, and, when the fulness of time was come, reconciled to Him. In Him, the Son of God, we have peace with God. He did all that was needful for me, and He appears for me before the eternal God, before whom as man I am dust and as sinner am fallen to eternal perdition. Through His Son God speaks for me with Himself. He is my advocate even with Him—that is His life for me, that is the Christian life that Christ lives, has lived, and will live to all eternity. That He lives as the Mediator between God and man, my Saviour, that is my Christian life!

And besides, there is this second point that is not to be divorced from the first. God lives in me through His Holy Spirit, who

again is no other than He, God Himself unto eternity.

Through His Holy Spirit He has begotten me again, me who was in sin, unto a lively hope that I may recognise myself as His child—in my sin, my lost condition, my earthliness, may recognise myself as righteous before Him. Not because I am that in myself, but because in Christ He has called and chosen me, has promised these His gifts to me through the Holy Spirit, because He has sanctified me, that is, singled me out so that I need not regard myself as lost, but as held by Him, comforted by Him, led by His Hand. And the meaning of Baptism is just this—that we have this promise of participation in this inconceivable life of God. God's life for us in Christ—in us through His Holy Spirit—that is the Christian life.

Dear friends, why do we not stop here? Why do we not come to a stand within this sanctuary, the bounds of which I have merely traced in a few words, each single one of

which could only give us a reminder of all the riches of that which is meant when we speak of the life of God in Christ and through His Spirit? How does it come about that the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, after speaking for eleven chapters of the deep things of God, and of the love of God for us and in us, and of the infinite promise of the grace of God directed to us as Christians, now goes on—here at this place where I have chosen the text—with the words: "I exhort you"? If the life of God is the Christian life, what sense is there in saying to men to whom this life is promised: I exhort you? This obviously means: Here we have reached the Christian life, in the sense of the question put to us—and now something has got to be done. The matter does not end with our being set down in this sanctuary, with our raising our hands in praise and adoration that we dare to stand here, rejoicing that God, God Himself, God alone does everything in the fulness of His power and glory. No,

but it again comes about—is it not as if we suddenly entered an entirely different world? —that we little men find ourselves there exactly as we are, as we know ourselves, as we know each other. And now we hear the words: Thou man, I exhort thee!

And now we would take up this call—which must surely be the meaning of the question about the Christian life in the sense in which it is here put to me—turn it upon ourselves and exhort one another. It is not God that we need to exhort but obviously ourselves. Is not this a perilous moment, is not this a perilous step that we now take? Might it not be that a great apostasy sets in with our entering into this question, a forgetting of what we have just called into remembrance: a forgetting of Christ and of the Spirit, a return to ourselves, to us men in our present situation, and therewith also to our powers and possibilities, to the circle of our existence where we find ourselves again preoccupied with ourselves.

And if we go too far along this road, who knows but we shall find everything back in the position where we left it at the moment when we began to consider: What is the meaning of "to be a Christian"? Does not the whole misery of our existence begin again, the misery of all those illusions which are inevitable with the man who is occupied with himself, illusions about his insight, his powers, and the goals that he can attain? Is there really any sense in throwing out the question: What must, what can we do? Is it not a rebellion against God Himself who in His grace has promised us: I will do it, I make all things new! Is man again to step in and act in God's place?

The recognition of the immense peril of this undertaking must be allowed to work upon us. We need not doubt that the Apostle Paul, when he made this transition from the deep things of God to man as he is (man whose being is by no means so very deep), was aware of what he was doing and did not

blindly go past the chasm which there opens up!—this transition to exhortation, to the Christian life now quite concretely conceived as our life, this question about our own action could also indeed have quite another meaning. It could mean that right in the sight of the holy and living Spirit, just because we have heard this word, and in weakness or in strength—probably in weakness—have tried to put faith in Him, we make at this very moment this admission, this honest admission to ourselves: even as such men, believing men—we say—we are still men living on the earth, and this great word of grace is spoken to me just as I am. Not for a moment will I forget that, while this word is in my ears and in my heart, I am just what I am and that all my questions, life and death questions, cares, temptations, yes, the whole boundless complexity of our life, exists now as always in human society, and that it is in this situation, within these confines, that I have heard the word and that I have to believe the word.

To be outside of this discord, out of sight of the fact that I, who have heard God's word, am a man and remain a man, this would mean that time has run its course, that the consummation has already taken place, that we are, not only reconciled in Christ and through His Spirit, but, redeemed, participate in eternal life and stand at our destination. That is the end of the way, that is the hope to which we have been begotten again, that is perfect communion with God! The Apostle Paul, however, did not speak to the perfect and the redeemed, but to the reconciled, to men who have heard the word of faith but who, dwelling in this temporal state, have not yet taken down the tent, who still await the habitation which is in heaven. This is the situation in which we are also! And when we pass over to the position in which we are exhorted and in which we allow ourselves to be exhorted, this transition, far from meaning that we have a conceit of ourselves, could rather mean that we honestly

understand that God is only on the way with us.

Our question concerns the Christian life as it moves along this road of discord. So in actual fact there springs up *beside* the question of faith—even if inseparable from it—a *second* question. It is mortifying and depressing that the question about Christian life is different from that about faith. There was no necessity that it should be different. But it is different. The reason why God is still on the way with us, not yet at the goal, is that our faith never actually has within itself, nor brings to completion, obedience, love, and action, as Luther has so beautifully described it. In my opinion, *too* beautifully. How I love God, after I have heard and understood that He first loved me, that stands in another book. Just because we exist on this side of the consummation, in time and not yet in eternity, the question about the Christian life as a question about what happens to us, about our little Ego, is a special one that very well

deserves to be asked! In raising this question we are true and loyal. We give God the glory as now we needs must when we can do it only as Christians who are upon the way, *viatores*.

In allowing ourselves to be exhorted, to be quite plainly and simply (not just sentimentally and with the mental reservation: properly speaking I do not really need it) exhorted by the hand that is uplifted, the finger of the Law, by the question, Where art thou, Adam, where hidest thou? by the commandment, Thou shalt! or even by the invitation, Thou mayest; in any case by the indication of something that has got to be done, some action that must take place without fail—in consenting to that, humbling ourselves as believers and admitting to ourselves that we are not yet at the goal, by this very act we place ourselves—and this is the great matter—on firm ground, secure ourselves against the fanciful notions that would crop up all too readily if we failed to take this step. Do not let us

regret allowing ourselves to be exhorted to inquire about the Christian life, of which we are not deprived by the life of God. By the life of God, the Christian life in an original sense, something is demanded of us. And it is just this demand that is the bond of truth which binds us with the life of God. For God is a God of truth. He will not have, He will not suffer the anomaly of His living for us and in us, and our living a different kind of life altogether. But in His living for us and in us, He Himself comes close to us. God Himself is the necessity for this question of ours! By our sense of the oppressiveness of this question, by the anxiety with which it fills us, we learn the truth of the reconciliation, which we would not evade. If we could evade it, could in a dream transport ourselves to a region where we could think: It is enough that I believe; in so doing I love and obey; God has done all for me, now I am simply going to abandon myself to Him, be in Him, and flow in Him like a drop of water

in a stream ; now there is no need any more of thought, of questioning, of law ; now I am delivered into the liberty of the children of God—alas for us, if such a thing were possible for us ! In view of the fearful reality of God, and of the fearful reality of our own life, there could be no other alternative than that we should one day awaken out of this dream : like those who after the fashion of Icarus wanted to fly to the sun and had to learn by experience that that cannot be done. The liberty in which there is no longer any difference between God's activity and ours is something that we do not have, something for which we wait, for which we sigh. We see : there before us is God's great eternal activity. And then we see, as something totally different—another thing altogether, because God is true—the demand, the question about the Christian life that we have got to live.

From what has just been said, we should have a pretty clear idea of what in its main

lines the Apostle has to say to us. To-day we shall confine ourselves to the first verse. Let us briefly ponder the three things there that are of decisive importance.

(1) I exhort you by the mercy of God.

(2) I exhort you to present your life.

(3) I exhort you to present your life as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God: all this finally gathered up in the remarkable conception of the reasonable worship that we are to offer.

Dear friends, in my opinion—if I understand the matter aright—this expression that Paul here uses, this point of view under which he places the question over which we are wrestling together, says that all that which we have gathered together as the great word of the grace of God, just that and nothing else, is the basis and the real motive of what we are asking about: our own human activity as Christians, as men who are baptized and who have understood the word of baptism:

I admonish you by the mercy of God. If I understand that aright, it means first and foremost: I admonish you as those who are not for a moment different, as those who are in need of mercy. We must realise that in the question about our activity we come into consideration as beings who are absolutely nothing else than lost sinners. Just by Christ's coming forward on our behalf, and by our being born again through His Holy Spirit, we are able to regard ourselves, as we really are, simply as lost sinners.

To exhort by the mercy of God cannot mean that we come round again by a détour to a position in which trust is placed in us —in our powers, possibilities, reason, insight, goodness, and the freedom of our will. You must understand: it is the man with the enslaved will who is there exhorted, who needs real mercy, who is an out-and-out prisoner, not only as we commonly think, of earthly imperfections, of the senses, of nature, but a prisoner of evil, of the devil, as our

fathers justly said, a fallen man who can never raise himself up again.

It is not as if this exhorting could mean that we from our side could live a life for God and in God that could correspond to the great "God-for-us" and "God-in-us." We are only too readily inclined to turn things upside down in this simple manner, and to answer the question about the Christian life in a way that views the matter equilaterally: God has done something for us, now it is up to us to do something for Him. You know Zinzendorf's saying, "That I did for thee, what wilt thou for Me?" I am not going to attack that expression in its proper signification. But it must be clearly understood that the two sides in the relationship are not on an equality. First of all, there can be no thought of our doing anything "for God." There is no getting away from the fact that everything that we are is against God, and there is no stage of our life at which we might change. Nowhere in our

existence can a spot ever be found where we could say: I am now out of peril, now I am for God. But if we are truly exhorted, that means that we allow it to be said to us with finality: Thou art against God!

The other side, the life of God in us, stands on exactly the same footing. We can certainly speak of a life of Christians in God. But I should be always wanting to raise my hand with the caution: Do not speak too quickly of this our life in God! When we look at ourselves, we are compelled to say: Our place is decidedly not in God. We live in the world—with ourselves. That is the great charge under which we stand, that is what shocks us as we view ourselves: that we live thus in the world, in a place really far from Him, outside of God. And if it is otherwise, if we might characterise our life as a life in God, yet we must at the same time call to mind that Paul says: It is hidden with Christ in God. The truth that here in the world we are in God, that we may conceive

of this world as God's world, and our place as the spot where He is Lord, is not an obvious thing, open to the eyes of day, but a miracle of God. Our real life in God consists in nothing else than our admitting to ourselves: we do not live in God, but far from God. He who is in God, he it is who knows that he is far from God, that he is in need of mercy. The situation never arises in which he could have need of something other than pure mercy, in which something other than grace could become important for us. Grace, the whole of grace, and nothing but grace!

But then to be exhorted by the mercy of God most certainly means also this second thing: to be a man who has received mercy. And that, rightly understood, will mean to be a man who now in his distance from God and his opposition to God is acknowledged and understood, apprehended by this God, from whom he is far off and whose enemy he is; for with God understanding us involves

acting upon us. Our receiving mercy means that we are acknowledged of God!

Dear friends, if we are questioned, with the pistol at our head: How do you get the length of counting on the reality of God, of even so much as thinking of such a thing, and living on the basis of it (and perhaps also of being a proclaimer of this word, a theologian)? if we are so questioned we cannot uphold our knowledge of God by the assertion that we have known God, but all our alleged knowing of God can always only end in the confession, not that we have known God, but that He has known us in our blindness, in our folly and darkness, within the limits of humanity and of pure reason—that we are claimed by Him, without our being able to justify ourselves. It is mercy, and at no time anything else than mercy, to be apprehended of God, and on the basis of that to try to apprehend Him with our thoughts. To be understood, to be apprehended of God, will then mean that we make it clear to ourselves that step

by step and stage by stage God follows us with His mercy. It is not otherwise; human life in time, if one cares to make the attempt to live it before God, is a series of stages which, looked at from the human side, always leads downwards. From the human side it is more and more clearly realised how little we do know God, how little possible it is to be a Christian, to be a theologian. The thread by which my life is connected with God becomes, from the human point of view, thinner and thinner. There is no progress, but increasing retrogression. We see ourselves more and more helpless, we learn to know ourselves better and better, become more and more afraid of ourselves, observe what kind of sighing our faith is, what kind of stammering our speech, what kind of tottering like that of a little child, our so-called Christian life!

If we do not live our Christian life exhorted by the mercy of God, we might well be driven to despair. But we are not driven to

despair. Here is the wonderful power of Christian faith, and the wonderful mainstay of our Christian life—the word of the eternal mercy that follows us: that while we decrease, by the mercy of God our inward man increases. But please do not be thinking, when I say that, of something that we could turn to our own account, of a possibility of no more being ashamed of ourselves, of no more raising from the depths entreating hands to God. Nay, it is just here that prayer, and calling, and crying, and the utmost need really begin! But the inward man grows: for "All things have their day, God's love is for aye." God's mercy not only has no end, but grows and increases. While we descend stage by stage, it becomes greater and greater and accompanies us. And then there is no cause for despair! And I might now add the other point that even at these various stages through which we pass there is heard increasingly praise and thanksgiving for the goodness of God, for the glorious truth that He calls us

His children, that our confidence is no deception, His truth in Christ and in His Spirit no illusion, but that we can really live by it. Without that it is impossible to live!

I might add to that the third point: that to allow yourself to be exhorted by the mercy of God then no doubt means, to be a man who is held, simply held by the Hand of God that both humiliates and comforts. That is to be taken in a quite neutral sense, without asking whether it is to our advantage or not, whether it will make us happy or miserable! I can only say that if a man looks at what happens within himself, he finds himself always on Goethe's see-saw: "exulting to the heaven's heights—afflicted unto death." We must rather learn not to lay too much stress on that, learn that the divine joy and sorrow have nothing to do with our feelings. Perhaps you do not yet understand that, but must first of all have some practical experience of it in your own life. It is not altogether easy to make this distinction between the

divine joy and sorrow and our "exulting to the heaven's heights—and being afflicted unto death." But that is how matters stand: forgiveness is from beginning to end a being held! Let us, to begin with, put aside the question, whether joy or pain! Let us first of all stick to this: here is a hand. God's grace really avails. Forgiveness avails, lays hold of me just as I am. I am claimed by God, accepted by God. He does not regard me as too unimportant to use again to-day as He used me yesterday. He seems to find something in me that I myself cannot find. It is His goodness. I shall now keep firm hold of that: for the next task, the next conflict, the next complication. God's grace avails. I have this pledge. And with it I shall now live—shall fashion no great programme, but simply think of the fact that I have another quarter of an hour to live! And that would surely mean a beginning of Christian life. It is something that can take place in us: an inner attitude that the man

adopts, a human activity and so a meeting with God! Not unification, not fusion! To venture, then, on the strength of this meeting, that would be the first step of a Christian life.

Let us now turn to the other conceptions that Paul employs in order to show the meaning of "asking about the Christian life." We are to be exhorted by grace to present our bodies as a sacrifice. It is decisive that the term used is bodies. Apparently not only the soul, the spirit, the inner life! It is again the hand that is laid upon us. So the meaning is: I use you, man, exactly as you are. There is no better part in you. There is no absolute opposition between spirit and nature, soul and body. Such an idea does not come from the New Testament. We must let the Apostle tell us: There is no part of you superior. You are a sinner from head to foot. But God will assuredly use you from head to foot. In connection with this word about bodies, think of the great

sign that stands at the beginning of the Christian life in its original sense: Cross and Resurrection of the body of Christ. The Cross is the dying of His body and the Resurrection is the awakening of His body. And what is exhibited to us in Christ as the Logos, must be valid also for us, for the whole man. That is, again, a comfort for man. Παρακαλεῖν means at once to comfort and to exhort. It is a good thing that this cleavage of material and spiritual need not persist, but that we are called to a unity—that the hand is laid upon us as we are in all our creatureliness. We sin with soul and body, soul and body are reconciled, soul and body also are to be redeemed.

"Present your bodies" no doubt means that your whole life waits for the resurrection of the flesh! Your life as it is—in its creatureliness, sinfulness. There is no need for you to grow wings. There is no need for any kind of artificial being to be made out of you. The Christian life is not a super-

structure on top of the rest. It is, quite profanely and trivially, that life which each has to live in his station. One does not need to undertake this and that in order to live the Christian life. We live it in the place in which we find ourselves, in our situation.

But now it is this life that is claimed by God. There are no provinces of which we can say: God has no concern there—God does not need to interfere there. It is not as if there were a religious sphere where we are open to advice, and alongside of it another where life has its own laws and we let nothing of the light of God stream in upon us. But just as mercy embraces the whole, so the whole is placed likewise under the rigour of grace. Nothing less than all is what God wants and uses!

Present your bodies—that means to acknowledge this claim and grant its truth—against ourselves, in conflict with ourselves. There is no situation and no place in our life where comfort fails, but also none where the

thought of God does not mean the profoundest disturbance, none where we get peace. Our life as it is, is placed in God's light by Christ and His Spirit.

Finally, our life has, according to Paul, to be made a sacrifice. I take it that that is to be understood in a double sense. On the one hand, there is a certain reserve in the expression "sacrifice." When sacrifice was made in the old religions, which no doubt were also in Paul's mind here, in Israel and among the heathen peoples, that always meant an act which represented a substitution for what the man would really like to do, is willing to do, and ought to do in relation to God and what is demanded of him. By surrendering his best (*e.g.* the best of his herd), he shows his good will. He testifies before God that he is in earnest. And if he is in earnest, then God accepts his sacrifice, and this sacrifice is then a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God! Not because God needs what the man gives Him

—God does not need the sacrifice! But because he accepts it as witness to the fact that the man has heard His word, and would like to believe and obey. There is a sacrifice that God accepts and another that He does not accept, for the reason that it does not in verity witness to that to which sacrifice ought to witness. To sacrifice means to recognise ourselves and our existence as claimed by God. Here we come upon a restriction and a limit in regard to what we describe as Christian life. It is not as if, beginning now to live a Christian life, timidly taking the first steps, we thereby become organs of God, which carry out His will, through which God works. There is no continuity between the activity of God and our activity. Even if our activity were the most Christian, the most believing, the best, it remains our activity. Man remains man and God remains God. There are no blood-vessels through which the life of God overflows into our life. These are fanciful

ideas. We can make sacrifices, but only on the understanding that God is pleased to accept our sacrifice as testimony that we have heard God. No boasting can ever enter into our sacrifice, no sense of assurance, no thought that we have escaped the need of mercy. Sacrifice it remains, and only sacrifice. But this sacrifice is demanded of us. God wants it. It is not a matter of our becoming organs of God's activity, but of our presenting our life as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. By acknowledging God's word, acknowledging that "God holds us," we may venture to live the next quarter of an hour. If we perceive the significance of this quarter of an hour, we must face the question: How are we to sacrifice our will, our little existence, to God, how are we to believe and obey? Not because He needs it, or because I am necessary to Him, but because He is pleased to accept my sacrifice—for that reason I ought to do it and may do it. We are required to

do it. We have no choice. Just as in Israel and in the old religions, men had no choice but, conscious of their limitation, to perform this act, and that, because they were summoned to do so. He who is summoned, does not ask like the servant in the parable: What am I to do? Thou hast given me only a little pound, but goes off and executes the order. We are placed like those who have to execute an order, like those whose well-being depends on obedience. We must not shirk the sacrifice with the question: What are we to do? but must put ourselves at the disposal of God.

In recognising this in the act of faith we make the beginning of the Christian life. But that beginning is not made once and for all. It becomes evident that it must be made again and again as the beginning of the life that we ourselves have to live! The beginning in which our little "I" must say: "I believe—dear Lord, help my unbelief"—but, at the same time, I believe, I can not do anything else.

II

Dear friends, at the end of the last meeting we established, on the basis of the first verse, the position that a Christian who shall be the subject of the concept "Christian life" is to be understood as a man on whom God has set His claim. Christians are the people of Israel, God's own possession, from whom on that very account sacrifices are demanded.

Let us again study the whole situation. To be a Christian, a member of God's people, has as its presupposition the great act of the mercy of God. It is on that that the possibility of exhortation rests, the possibility of a Christian activity. The Christian life that we live has as its presupposition the Christian life in its primary sense, that which God the Lord Himself lives for us and in us in Jesus Christ by His Holy Spirit. Therefore—as

we made clear to ourselves—in all that we live out as Christians, in all that we must do and may do, there can be no question of anything but sacrifice. Sacrifice in the sense of a grateful homage that gives God the glory, of a witness to our acceptance of the claim that God makes upon us. There can be no question of that idea of sacrifice according to which we should by our sacrifice have the reconciling of God—we, by our petty efforts, the throwing of the bridge between us and God. The fact must be weighed that in the New Testament the thought of sacrifice was understood strictly in the sense that it could not for a moment be thought of as something able to be done by us for the completion of our reconciliation, our redemption. It *has been* done, the sacrifice is *finished*—our sacrifices can only be a witness to, a reflection, an echo of that great sacrifice that God out of His mercy has made for us! But now we proceed. We have said that faith in God's mercy cannot

exist without that obedience which, in all humility, but at the same time without choice, of necessity makes this sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Christian life. Of this life we are subject, we poor little men, in our low estate, in this our condition inwardly and outwardly, we who, so long as we are men, living in time and in this world, have stood, are standing, and will stand in infinite opposition to what God is.

This sacrifice, the offering of a Christian life—in what, now, is it to consist? There are two possible ways open to us in which we can treat of this.

We could attempt to do, what Calvin attempted in his *Institutes* in the famous chapter: "De vita hominis christiani"—give a short sketch, an outline of the essentials of the Christian life taken one by one, determine in relation to certain moral principles what would be Christian action in this direction, the action of a man who is an oblation, who knows himself to be

a sacrifice necessarily offered. How would this sacrifice, based on exhortation by the mercy of God, manifest itself in this place and in that? The other possible way would be quite directly to lay hold of and put before ourselves some particular problem that makes itself apparent in our practical life—perhaps our existence as scholars or our attitude to the family—some problem that can flare up at a definite point and trouble us, and then attempt to apply what has been said to that.

In our text neither the one thing is done nor the other. If we follow the words that Paul addresses to us in the second verse, we find ourselves simply confronted with the task of making clear to ourselves the question: What can be the meaning of all the acts of our life that are possible to us in consequence of our having heard this call, of our having become aware of this claim, and of our earnestly desiring to be Christians? What is then the denominator on which everything

now stands in virtue of the presupposition of the first verse? And now let us hear what follows. The first thing that is said is:

You must not accommodate yourself to the fashion of this world, must not adapt yourself to it, must not be at one with it (*μὴ συνσχηματίζειν*! *σχῆμα*=fashion, form). You must not consort with it—must not share in this fashion!—but *μεταμορφοῦσθε*! That denotes a change, also of fashion, of form. Into the place occupied by one form another must enter. The appearing of this other form in you must be the aim of your activity, of your exertions! But we must be clear that the simple translation has expressed too much. All that is said at first is: Take the direction away from this form; take the direction to this other form!

And then there is added: This is to happen through the renewing of your *νοῦς*, your thought, so that there is a proving and on the strength of that proof a knowledge of

what—what good, acceptable, perfect thing —is the will of God.

This demand is really a unity, but we must divide it up in this way :

(1) A resistance is to be offered and the course directed to something new.

(2) That is to come about through the renewing of your thought for the purpose of making a proof !

That is the answer that Paul gives to the question : " What is the meaning of the activity of a Christian ? " In all acts, in all spheres, in all problems, this must be the governing point of view, the objective to which the course must be steered, the line along which one travels ! In order to understand that, we must bring home to ourselves quite briefly the most important conceptions of which Paul speaks.

First of all it means : not to make any compromise with the form that this world has. *This world.* Christians are men who

have perceived, through what God's mercy has done for them, that the totality in which we live (not just existing there as stones, or vegetating as animals, but being there as men, with power of knowing and doing) that this world is characterised as *this world*, as ὁ αἰὼν ὁ οὗτος! What does that mean? Not that we live in a world which —as Marcion seems to have fancied (*i.e.* fancied that he had so to understand Paul) —is created by a wicked antigod or even by the devil. Not that we live in hell. We live in the *world*, and this world is *God's* world, created, sustained, and ruled by Him. We live entirely in the world, in which reconciliation has been effected in Christ. Not in an abyss where God is not at all present, but at a place where God has spoken and by means of His word has acted—and yet in spite of that, in *this* world! Clearly the thought is: there is *another* world and *this* world is not yet this other world, which in the words: "Be changed!" is set as a

goal towards which we, as Christians, have to cast our eyes and direct our steps. By the mercy of God man is given the knowledge of his lost condition, is recognised as sinner, but this recognition is on the part of God, who holds him as one who has received mercy and to whom his sins have been forgiven. But while he knows and recognises that, he recognises at the same time his own and the whole world's provisional character, the great " Not yet " under which everything of which he has experience stands, he and everything that is like him, everything that belongs to that context in which he, as a single member, stands under the same conditions as the rest. He knows also that the context of our life is not in such a form, is not so constituted as when created by God, but that we live in a world that is modified by the apostasy of man from God, by man's having cut himself off from God, having set himself in opposition to God, having become His enemy. This act, in which we continu-

ally participate, which is also continually our act, does not leave any part of our life unaffected, but by this primal act our whole life from its heights to its depths, from its outmost exterior to its inmost recesses—no islet anywhere being excepted—is modified in relation to God. To be sure a grace is promised to this sinner in this world; by the very fact of his being a *peccator justus* a hope is given to him in his sinfulness. He has become a man who awaits a redemption, who is looking forward to another world. But just because he hopes for another world, waits for something new created by God, he looks—he can do no other—with a quite definite resignation, a *Christian* resignation (to be distinguished from all pessimism and all world-weariness), upon the whole scheme of things that stretches out before our gaze. He has no idea of meeting, at any point in the world, the pure creation of God, but knows that the whole form of the world lies under the curse of God. It is true that this

curse has been *eternally removed* by Christ, but the consummation of that removal is *not yet*. We walk in *time*, by faith and not by sight. We do not see the new creation, but the old, just as it is; but we see it in the light of the promise!

And now, what is meant by the "form of this world"? What is the characteristic feature of the world that we know? I should like to ask whether it might not be this: We see in all that which we call world the sway of an impulse, a vital impulse which we can well take to have been imparted by God to all life at the creation. But in the form in which we see this vital impulse, it is a movement—this will to live, this urgent desire of the creature for life—a movement which is not at any stage to be understood otherwise than as an act, in which we, sin-laden, stand accused, since we are not pure, but impure. And secondly (and in consequence of that): a movement, an impulse that has got to come to an end somewhere,

victim to death, to the transitoriness of all things earthly. All things that live here have their day. And if I have just spoken of a curse, which burdens the world, that is simply the curse of death, to which all earthly life is subjected.

To linger over this for a moment more—the form of this world and its guiltiness are recognisable in man in the fact that all man's will to live is from top to bottom, even if other elements seem also to play their part, an effort of some sort to increase the size, the height, the length of our self, our little Ego. I am not referring only to a crude egoism, but quite simply to what we would all naturally like to do—to give expression to our own peculiar nature, practise our own ideas of right, maintain our own authority, assert our own powers. And in doing this—setting this Ego to live out its nature, and to unfold itself—we become guilty, we transgress the law, we are evil. The presence of something guilty is con-

tinually being proved to us by our clashing with others as we pursue this course, by the fact that what we call life necessarily leads to conflicts, which we cannot evade and through which the social life of men resolves itself into a fight. Even our higher spiritual life becomes in some form either positively or negatively the struggle for existence. For example, by our neglecting or wronging others. How often do we conduct the struggle in this manner. We go our own ways, without thinking of the consequences. And yet we cannot roll off this burden—leaving out of the question altogether those many cases where we positively clash with others, get into conflict with their life. And in this conflict of life with life I would see the real characteristic form of life in this world.

So far as this definition of the form of this world is correct, we now stand before the great question: In how far can we say that this world—in which matters go on in this

way, from the highest animate beings to the infusoria, in the spiritual sphere as in the natural—is "God's world"? Paul does not give a theoretical answer, but utters the exhortation: You must not adapt yourself to the form of this world!

We cast another glance at the "Be changed"! In contrast to the "Be not conformed" this points to another world, to one that is not "given," one that does not appear as such in time. And if we see life in this world as the life in which man expresses himself, and which is tragically reflected in the whole course of the creature, then in contrast to that the life of the other, now future world will plainly consist in a life in which what is peculiar to *God* will prevail in everything, and above all again in man—in which, if one might put it so, what is peculiar to God takes the place of what is peculiar to the ego, since the meaning of creation was and is that the world should again be His world. Therefore this other

world is called the Kingdom of God, in which He is the Master and not we. In this "He and not we" lies the opposition of the new and the old!

The Apostles saw this new world of the life in which God rules dawning in Jesus Christ. What is narrated in enigmatical manner in the Gospels about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is clearly at bottom really nothing else than the appearance—in a way that points to the ultimate—and the cognition of this Kingdom of God, of a life that is God's own, not centred in the human self, but, as man's life, God's life and therefore life that has escaped the curse and spell of death: resurrection life. The other world is thus the world which dawns in redemption, on which we wait, to which, having been claimed by the mercy of God, we look as those who hope. But we recall: resurrection takes place on the far side of the Cross, new life follows death. The early Christians prayed: may

the form of this world pass away, and then: Thy Kingdom come!

We understand now the demand: Do not adapt yourself to the form of this world, but be changed!—then what does it mean concretely for us?

Is it not the case that, quite plainly, as long as we are men, we carry about with us the form of this world, and lack the form of the future world? Do we want to abate somewhat the rigour of the truth—both the truth of man, of the present world, and the truth of God, of the future world? Do we want to make things easier for ourselves—represent our situation more simply by saying: There is an intermixture of the two; we are now at once old and new, there is a growth of the one into the other? We should again fall into illusion if we did not see quite clearly that there can be no question of our shattering the form of this world, throwing it from us, and anticipating the Resurrection. The truth holds not only for the uncon-

verted, but for converted Christians that they are and remain beings who exist in this world and who, in all that they do and are, wear the form of this æon. And their finest and most earnest and ever so well-meant accomplishments will always bear the stamp of an act of this great vital impulse. Nothing is simpler than to bring Christian religious impulses, even the highest and most intimate, to this biological denominator, and to understand them as a life activity alongside of others, and equally questionable. Guilt and transitoriness are the main characteristics of even our best deeds. Just here we can do nothing else than confess: "Surely what we do is to no profit, even in the best life." And it is just the converted man who can say that.

As the men who know that about themselves better than those who have not yet been claimed by God's mercy, we are pardoned, and must regard ourselves as men who are now sacrificed, men who now have the

task—what task?—to be perhaps a little bit of new world within the present world, a little bit of resurrection, an angel or the like, or even a little bit of Christ? Have a care! He who here aims at too much, might easily get too little! That will not do! But this will do—in the midst of this world to know that the great sacrifice that had to be made for us, has been made, that we are holy, righteous, pure through Jesus Christ, that we as sinners, as the lost, as living beings among others, are called to bear witness—to bear witness on the one hand against the form of this world, and on the other, in favour of the form of the coming world!

That is the double meaning of action of ours. It is not an action of which we could say that as such it was exempt from the laws of this world that is destined to decay, but an action that within this world is directed to giving God the glory. And God's mercy is just this: that this possibility exists, that we, even as sinners who have nothing of

which to boast, can and may give Him the glory.

This possibility exists. That it exists is grace, but it does exist. There are differences in what we can do—no absolute differences, so that a deed as such is a deed that already belongs to the new world. No, certainly not that! But it is as if all deeds lay covered over with a veil. Under this veil, however, under this covering, there are differences of greater and less, higher and lower, better and worse—all relative to earth under the proviso that the whole is even now sinful, guilty, under death—and yet differences! We must not allow ourselves to be blinded by what we have again brought to our remembrance about the way in which we stand before God—it must not be that, like one who has gazed on the sun, we see nothing more at all. Even if we have received only one pound and not five, we must not say, "I cannot do anything," but with the pound we must do something. What we

can do, just that we must do. There are, amongst those things which we men can do, things that can mean a protest against the form of this world, against the dominance of this life-impulse. It is possible for man to resist himself, to acknowledge that God is right as against himself—relative to earth, of course, but such possibilities do occur! And if these possibilities are now seized by the man as one who having been called by God would like to obey, that is accepted in grace as well-pleasing to God, as good, as perfect. Not because it is in itself perfect, but because he did it in obedience. And there are some things possible which, more than others, are able to bear witness, are full of hints, parables of the coming world, the new world, the Kingdom of God. Not as if the Kingdom of God dawned with such deeds, such human activity. We cannot build the Kingdom of God. But we will honestly say: There we are dealing with the Church—or to express it less theologically: the good. We can deal

with that, not with the Kingdom of God—but even so perhaps with the Church of Christ that would like to take up the struggle of the turning from the old world and the turning to the new. There are actions that are a protest, and some that are a proclamation. These are that good, acceptable, perfect thing! And now Paul says: It must be by the renewing of our thought that we recognise what is protest, what proclamation, what the turning from the old and the turning to the new, what is acceptable to God, what He would have of us in this world.

"Renewing of our thought" is what Paul calls here the primary demand, the primary meaning of all our Christian action. I do not think that I am missing the mark when I relate that to the better-known expression: repentance: μετάνοια. In this expression, however, thought plays a decisive role. The reason is installed as the place where unceasingly a renewal is to come about, where this turning is to be effected—the turning

from and the turning to. Do not let us think poorly of thought; do not let us share in the anti-intellectualism of these days! We cannot act without thinking! The great demand that the mercy of God imposes on us is primarily the demand of right thought, of a knowledge out of which then the right action must come! Repentance means: effect must be given in our thought to the knowledge—which puts our will in motion—that we have to be thankful to God.

Gratitude is certainly not an action by which we think that we can give something adequate back to him to whom we are grateful. That is not gratitude, that is commercialism. True gratitude is where we realise: he has given me something for which I cannot and need not return equal value. Real gratitude always sees in the gift something infinitely great, and can only exist by giving in return a token: I have understood what you mean, I am glad that

you are fond of me, I feel myself under an obligation to you, and now, as far as I can, I will show it. This "showing it," this thankfulness is the sacrifice that we can make. That cannot mean doing something divine—for it is something infinite that God has done for us. We can only give a token: I have understood, heard, and want to stand to Thee in this way, because Thou lovest me. When this thought is grasped, this renewal then takes place. And that is what repentance is—something hard and severe, but at the same time also the most heart-felt and tender thing that we can conceive. That is the starting-point for this proving and knowing.

And now still a third conception: readiness—the idea that one is a man who is on guard, who knows what is at stake, who has seen the state of life and who has heard that there has been spoken the great "Halt! Not yet," but at the same time also the great "Be not afraid, rejoice!" We must

then be like a soldier, who is stationed at a post, and who waits for the chance of shooting when the enemy appears. Or to put it in a more biblical form: We then belong to the wise and not to the foolish virgins! This attentiveness means that we know that each moment of life is a decision! And now the chief thing is that, spite of my foolishness, my blindness, I do what I must do, since Christ has died for me and the Holy Ghost has been given to me. This is renewal, this will to watch—and that is the chief thing!

And now the meaning of a Christian life in detail, in particular actions would be that this consciousness would continually prevail, this renewing of our thought! And then not to forget the last thing of all: that just while we act and have the feeling of responsibility, and at the call of grace are not slack, just then we are perfectly conscious of this: The fact that I am in this position at all, the position of being able to do something that is in God's sight good, perfect, accept-

able, is nothing but pure mercy. I am not needed for it, I cannot become an artist in the Christian life, I cannot deal with my way according to any modern Christian cleverness —I can only each moment turn to God and say: It is Thou, who holdest me, who carriest it through. Thou alone through Jesus Christ, Thou livest in thy Holy Spirit the Christian life—and in consequence of that I will dare, as man, as Christian upon earth, to live it also!

And now for simple faith the most
We supplicate the Holy Ghost,
That He preserve us at our end
When from this weary world we wend.

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